
Beginner's Corner

Organization of Perfin Catalogs

Paul Mistretta (LM#111)

This month I will try to cover another very broad area of information necessary to understanding perfin literature. With very broad strokes I will attempt to cover the processes (highly variable) of cataloging perfins as it has been done by various authors/editors.

The first thing to recognize is that the development of an organized structure in which to classify perfins is as variable as the personalities involved in this process. The resulting differences in pattern numbering can be highly confusing even to experienced collectors moving into new collecting areas.

Generally speaking, catalogs are organized alphabetically by pattern content, although there are serious variations even on this theme. This organization is based on knowledge derived from collections accessible to those developing the catalog.

The most obvious problem for all who try to catalog a bit of history from observed items is that they do not necessarily know all of the items to be cataloged, and this problem plagues classifiers of perfins! In most catalogs, when a new item is identified it is artificially wedged into the (alphabetically) appropriate location by manipulating the numbering in some manner.

And a secondary problem faced is what to do with die varieties of a pattern. Die varieties can result from a variety of sources. The most obvious is the use of a manually prepared multiple die perforator head which punches anywhere from 2 to 10 stamps simultaneously, whose patterns are essentially the same – but are not absolutely identical to each other due to very slight variations in pin position. Perforator pin breakage over time also causes identifiable varieties, as does deliberate manipulation of the pins to create new patterns.

Both these issues will be discussed below within the context of each variation on the theme.

Simple Sequential Numbering

Perhaps the simplest cataloging is that in which all of the patterns are lined up alphabetically and are numbered sequentially from “1” through whatever is the last number needed. An example of this form of organization can be found on the Internet at Rod Sell’s site <http://rodsell.com/hkperfins/hkperfin.html> where *Hong Kong Perfins* are organized and displayed alphabetically in a simple sequential numerical series running from 1 to 66. In a slight modification to the more common pattern, this list (based on information from the Hong Kong study group) assigns primary catalog numbers to the user of the pattern rather than to the pattern itself.

In the listing of Hong Kong perfins the problem of newly discovered users is handled by assigning uppercase letters at the end of the catalog number of the user’s name which immediately alphabetically precedes the newly discovered user name; see 8A (The Bank of Canton Limited) and 8B (Bank of Commerce). The latter pattern was discovered (apparently) after assigning catalog number 9 to the Banque de l’Indo-Chine.

Finally, in this catalog die varieties are cataloged by assigning a lowercase letter as a suffix to appropriate catalog numbers. However, differing from most catalogs of perfins with which I am familiar, patterns which I would number as distinctly different from each other and thus worthy of distinct major catalog numbers are treated as die varieties of the company’s catalog number. For a good example of this specialized variation compare pattern 33g and pattern 33h, which by most catalogers would be identified with different primary catalog numbers (not just by suffix).

One final observation about simple sequential number series as a cataloging tool, it is most commonly used for countries or stamp issuing agencies for which few patterns are known or for work sheets in the early stages of development. As the number of patterns known for an issuing unit

increases the simple 1-to-the-end pattern of assigning numbers usually becomes less useful in describing the material and is abandoned for a variation on this theme.

Simple Sequential Numbering A Variation

One variation of note to the simple linear numbering described above is that used by Bob Schwerdt in *The World Perfins Catalog*. In this four-volume work patterns were numbered in a simple linear sequence, but with several classes of stamp/seal recognized and distinguished by an alphabetic prefix. These are: commercial perfins in postage stamps - prefixed with an "A"; fiscal (revenue) stamps - preceded by a "B"; official, personal or exhibition perfins - preceded by a "C"; and, fraudulent (for whatever reason) items - prefixed with an "F".

Within each of the type designators the simple sequential numbering scheme is followed. Also, in this world catalog newly found patterns are generally designated with a decimal value that places them appropriately in the numerical sequence.

Alphabetically Subdivided Linear Numerical Sequencing

This is the most common form of cataloging encountered in perfins literature. It is a basic variation on the theme already discussed, separate number sequences beginning at '1' are alphabetically assigned for patterns in separate sections for patterns beginning with each letter of the alphabet (A-Z) and, also, in sections for Number and Design patterns. This reduces the overall length of number sequences in any section, but some of these sequences can still be very large in some of the more prolific perfin issuing countries. It also gives slightly more information about the pattern itself. Basic catalog numbers in this format will appear similar to the following – A1, B195, R10, etc.

Many major country catalogs employ this system including many of those with the largest number of patterns. These include (but are not limited to) the *Catalog of United States Perfins*, *Canadian Stamps with Perforated Initials*, *Katalog Perfínu z území Československa*, *Austria Perfins*, *Perfins van Belgie*, *Catalog of Bavarian Perfins*, *Catalogo dei Perfin Italiani*, etc. etc.

Numbering of newly discovered patterns is done in a manner similar to that discussed above, though variations are found in the manner in which suffixes are assigned. For example, in the United States catalog new patterns discovered between existing ones are generally assigned a decimal suffix between the appropriate numbers. As an illustration US pattern A305.5 ("A&T") was discovered after A305 ("A&S") and A306 ("A&W/Co") had been numbered; it was thus assigned a fractional number in the sequence between the two already numbered patterns. Dies of a pattern are also handled in a manner similar to that described – by suffix (for the US catalog an alphabetic one).

Other Methods of Cataloging Australia, France, Germany, Great Britain, & Japan

Five major country catalogs (at least) have very distinctive patterns for numbering patterns. I will briefly discuss each of these below.

Matthews' *Handbook of Australian Private Perfins* presents an alphanumeric description of each pattern followed by a decimal and then a number assigned in simple numerical sequence for patterns with that description. The alphanumeric descriptor simply lists, in series, all characters in the pattern read left to right beginning on the top line and proceeding l to r from line to line if necessary). Thus numbers appear as A.1, A&CO.5, A&ETCL.1, etc. I do not see decimal notation for new patterns and suspect that, due to the generally small number of multiple patterns with identical alphanumeric descriptor, new patterns when found are simply included at the end of the current list for the appropriate pattern.

Dedecker, Herbert and Janot use a variation of this system in their *Timbres Perfores – France et Colonies*. As in the Australian catalog they use a full alphanumeric descriptor in the assigned catalog number. (They do include a slash in their descriptors to separate lines in the pattern.) However, they consecutively number patterns within each letter of the alphabet. Thus you have catalog numbers of the following type: EG 72, E.G 73, E.G. 74 EGD 75, EG/R 76, etc. New patterns found after number assignment are distinguished by adding a hyphen followed by a number as for EG 70, EG 70-1, and EG 70-2. As an aside here, it can be argued that, if

the pattern description which prefixes the number is reduced to its first letter, this catalog uses alphabetically divided linear numerical sequencing as described earlier. However, this is not done and so it must be assumed it was not the authors' intent.

The ARGE *Katalog der deutschen Firmenlochungen* uses a numbering system all its own. Consisting of three parts it forms a highly descriptive catalog number, but one very different from those described above. The basic format for numbering patterns is #.XXX##. The fields are as follows: '#' = The pattern type where '1' = a single horizontal line pattern, '2' = a 2 horizontal line pattern, '3' = monograms or vertical line patterns, and '4' = designs without letters; '.XXX,' = the first three (or fewer if there are less than three) alphabetic characters in the pattern's description; and '##' is a simple sequential number assigned to the pattern beginning with '1' for each #.XXX combination.

A Catalog of Great Britain Perfins also uses its very own system for pattern designation. Within each letter of the alphabet numbers were originally assigned as a four digit number in a sequence of tens - thus, 0010, 0020, 0030, 0040, etc. Each ten represents a separate pattern type - generally the 0010 designation represents the single letter patterns for the specified alphabet section. Thus the pattern A0010 is the single character "A", and the various single "A" patterns are distinguished from each other by adding a 2-digit decimal (A0010.01, A0010.02, etc.) New patterns were inserted using one of the missing numbers between the tens (0015) or adding a third decimal place (0010.015). Obviously, given that close to half the known world patterns are British perfins, this is an important international system!

And, finally, The Adachi catalog of Japanese perfins has, of necessity, a totally unique cataloging system. During the creation of this catalog, there was an obvious problem that required a creative solution. Japanese perfins occur some with Roman characters, some with Japanese characters, and some with designs or geometric patterns without alphabetic characters of either type. In addition the catalog had to be usable by Japanese collectors (many of whom are unfamiliar with the Roman alphabet) and collectors in the rest of the world (most of whom are unfamiliar with Japanese ideograms).

Adachi's solution to this confusion was elegant in its simplicity. Beginning with the Roman alphabet's 'C' ('A' was used for embossed security devices and 'B' for hand-stamped devices) he organized the perfins section of the catalog by character set used and numbers of characters in the stamp.

The sections are laid out as follows: 'C' = single Roman letter patterns; 'D' = single Roman letter enclosed in a design; 'E' patterns = 2 Roman letters; 'F' = 2 Roman letters plus or within a design; 'G' = 3 Roman letters whether enclosed in a design or not; 'H' = 4 or more Roman letters in the pattern; 'J' = single Japanese character; 'K' = single Japanese character enclosed in a design; 'L' = 2 Japanese characters forming the pattern (generally oriented one above the other); 'M' = 3 Japanese character patterns; 'N' = 4 Japanese character patterns; 'P' - 'S' sections appear to duplicate the previous Japanese character sections (but here my knowledge breaks down - I suspect that the distinction of these sections may be a more 'modern' and less stylized character set than in previous sections); 'T' = designs and Arabic numerals; 'W' = designs (some with Roman alphabetic characters); 'X' = naval anchor patterns; and, 'Y' = a single pattern which is a postal cancellation device (separated by use rather than by format). Sections characterizing Roman character patterns are organized alphabetically

So now, hopefully, when you see a catalog number for a perfin pattern it will be somewhat less mysterious. I am sure that this is neither the definitive and nor a totally comprehensive discussion of this subject! Always check the front of the catalog; generally in the introduction to the catalog there is a discussion of the catalog organization and its numbering system.

Note: Next month I will discuss the process(es) of describing patterns. But, for the purposes of trying to interpret the auction descriptions in this issue, generally speaking, catalog numbers are used in describing patterns offered. However, some patterns are described in quotes. These descriptions are actual pattern descriptions and are used where a catalog number was unavailable.

And a quick correction - **Lou Repeta** (#1481) notes in last month's acronyms - BEP is the Bureau of Engraving & Printing not the other way around.